

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 00761 212227Z

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1648

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 0761

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV MILI, PINR, VE

SUBJECT: NEW VENEZUELAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE

SUMMARY: ARMY MAJOR GENERAL ALVAREZ TORRES IS THE NEW VENEZUELAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE. LACKLUSTER, LOYAL AND SEEMINGLY UNAMBITIOUS, ALVAREZ IS LIKELY TO ACCEPT FULLY THE LEADERSHIP OF PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ. EMBASSY HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH ALVAREZ, WHO IS VERY FRIENDLY TOWARDS THE U.S. END SUMMARY

1. ON JANUARY 20, PRESIDENT PEREZ PERSONALLY SWORE INTO OFFICE THE NEW VENEZUELAN DEFENSE MINISTER, ARMY MAJOR GENERAL FRANCISCO ELOY ALVAREZ TORRES. ALVAREZ RELIEVED MAJ. GEN. HOMERO LEAL TORRES, WHO HAD BEEN DUE TO RETIRE LAST JULY BUT WHO REMAINED AN ADDITIONAL SIX MONTHS AT PRESIDENT PEREZ'S REQUEST. ALTHOUGH ALVAREZ HAS BEEN RUMORED IN RECENT WEEKS TO BE THE FRONTRUNNER, SPECULATION HAD BEEN RAMPANT FOR MONTHS OVER WHO WOULD SUCCEED LEAL. PRESIDENT PEREZ MAINTAINED TOTAL SILENCE ON THE SUBJECT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE.

2. ELOY ALVAREZ TORRES WAS BORN IN 1928 IN THE ANDEAN STATE OF MERIDA. HE COMES FROM A WELL-KNOWN CONSERVATIVE FAMILY ACTIVE IN THE RULING ACCION DEMOCRATICA (AD) PARTY IN MERIDA. HOWEVER, ALVAREZ HIMSELF IS RUPTED TO BE LARGELY APOLITICAL AND INTERESTED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN MILITARY AFFAIRS. PRINCIPALLY AN INFANTRY OFFICER, HE BEGAN HIS MILITARY CAREER IN 1947, ADVANCING THROUGH THE RANKS TO BECOME ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF IN 1974. HE HAD TWO  
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 CARACA 00761 212227Z

INFANTRY TRAINING TOURS AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA IN THE MID-1950'S.

IN SEPTEMBER 1975, HE MOVED UP TO THE NUMBER TWO POSITION IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE ARMED FORCES. VENEZUELAN AND U.S. OFFICERS WHO KNOW HIM CONSIDER ALVAREZ ONE OF THE BEST COMMANDERS AND STAFF OFFICERS IN THE VENEZUELAN ARMY.

3. ALVAREZ IS AN INTELLIGENT, BUT NOTABLY UNPREPOSSESSING INDIVIDUAL. HE IS SHORT (ABOUT FIVE FEET SIX INCHES TALL), THIN, RETIRING IN MANNER, AND SEEMINGLY UNAMBITIOUS. HIS PERSONALITY IS IN TOTAL CONTRAST TO THAT OF HIS MAIN COMPETITOR FOR THE MINISTERIAL POSITION, AIR FORCE MAJOR GENERAL MANUEL PAREDES BELLO. PAREDES, WHO WAS WIDELY RUMORED FOR MONTHS TO BE LEAL'S SUCCESSOR, IS A LARGE, ROBUST, OUTGOING MAN, WITH AN APPETITE FOR SOCIALIZING AND A FLAIR FOR PUBLICITY--AND WHOSE HEADLINE-GRABBING REPORTEDLY IRRITATED PRESIDENT PEREZ. IN CHOOSING ALVAREZ, PEREZ HAS MADE CLEAR THAT HE PREFERS TO HAVE A DOCILE, LOYAL AND MANAGEABLE OFFICER AS HIS DEFENSE MINISTER.

4. ALVAREZ HAS INVARIABLY DISPLAYED FRIENDSHIP AND OPENESS TOWARDS AMERICAN OFFICIALS. AT SOCIAL FUNCTIONS, HE IS OFTEN THE FIRST VENEZUELAN GENERAL OFFICER TO SEEK OUT AN AMERICAN FOR CONVERSATION. ALVAREZ IS PRO-U.S. AND DOES NOT BOTHER TO CONCEAL IT. HE IS MARRIED AND HAS THREE CHILDREN.  
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